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Dimensions of uncertainty in collaborative information behavior

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Many researchers have pointed to the importance of the affective aspect of information behavior in order to understand and model more adequately how people seek and use information (e.g. Kuhlthau, 1991; 2004; Nahl & Bilal, 2007; Wilson, 1981, 1999). Wilson (1981), for example, conceptualizes the affective need as a primary need that triggers information behavior. Kuhlthau (1991; 2004) addresses affective experiences in association with the information search process and demonstrates how their complex interplay with cognitive experiences and physical actions move the seeker from the initial state of a recognized information need to the goal state of resolution. According to Kuhlthau (1991) the information seeker generally experiences uncertainty at the initial stage resulting from a gap in knowledge which will change as he or she gets information and constructs knowledge. In addition to the psychological and cognitive factors influencing the information seeker's emotional experiences work task factors have been found to affect as well. Onwuegbuzie (1997), for example, found that anxiety among students correlated with aspects of the research process (the Research Proposal Writing (RPW)-anxiety). Further, Byström & Järvelin (1995) identified a correlation between affective behavior and task complexity. Following from this different factors may contribute to the information seeker's emotional experiences and affect information behavior accordingly. However, previous studies have often focused on individuals' information behavior, though many of these often engage in group based problem solving involving collaborative information behavior. In this presentation the affective dimension of information behavior is addressed in association with the influence from social factors. More specifically it is investigated to what extent uncertainty is associated with social factors and how this is reflected in the information behavior of five groups of LIS students while preparing a project assignment.

The first part of the presentation critically outlines the affective dimension of information behavior. In the second part the research design of the study is presented, that is, a description of the research questions, the participants, the work task and the data collection methods applied. Finally, the results of the study are presented and discussed, leading to the conclusion and implications for future research and practice.

The results presented on the *affective* dimension of group based problem solving and information behavior are part of a larger study.

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